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THE RESOLUTIONS

OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE

Friends to the Liberty of the Press,

December 19th, 1792.

ALSO,

THE DECLARATION

OF THE

SECOND MEETING, January 22nd, 1793,

WRITTEN BY THE

Hon. THOMAS ERSKINE;

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A LETTER

TO

Mr. REEVES, Chairman of the Association for
preserving Liberty and Property:

By THOMAS LAW, Esq.

Late one of the COMMITTEE of that Society.

LONDON:

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THE RESOLUTIONS

OF THE FREE TRADE SOCIETY OF THE

Friends to the Liberty of the Press

Presented at the Meeting of the Society

on the 14th of May 1844

THE DECLARATION

OF THE

Second Meeting, January 1844

WRITTEN BY THE

Hon. THOMAS FRISKINE



MR. REEVES, Chairman of the Association for

promoting Liberty and Reform

BY THOMAS LAW, Esq.

Lawyer of the Court of Common Pleas

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LONDON

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STATIONER, 11, MARK LANE

1844

[Printed by the Society]

libel, and made the subject of criminal prosecution, unless
 each writing shall appear to be published with a design
 to excite the people to rebellion, or to the execution of the existing laws.

THE RESOLUTIONS

OF THE FIRST MEETING OF THE
 FRIENDS TO THE LIBERTY OF THE PRESSES.

Friends to the Liberty of the Presses.

—

Free Mason's Tavern, December 22.

AT a General Meeting of the Friends of the Freedom
 of the Press, convened this day by public advertisement,
 GERARD NOEL EDWARDS, Esq. M. P. in the Chair,
 Unanimously Resolved,
 1st. That the Liberty of the Press is a right insepa-
 rable from the Principles of a free government, and essen-
 tial to the security of the British constitution.
 2d. That this liberty consists in the free discussion and
 examination of the principles of civil Government, and
 of all matters of public opinion.

3d. That

3d. That no writing ought to be considered as a public libel, and made the subject of criminal prosecution, unless such writing shall appear to be published with a design to excite the People to resist the Civil Magistrate, or obstruct the execution of the existing laws.

4th. That such publications may become proper objects of prosecution, and that the Executive Government is entrusted with powers amply sufficient for that purpose.

5th. That we have therefore seen with uneasiness and alarm the formation of certain societies, which, under the pretence of supporting the executive magistrate, and defending the Government against sedition, have held out general terrors against the circulation of writings, which, without describing them, they term seditious; and entered into subscriptions for the maintenance of prosecutions against them; a proceeding doubtful as to its legality, unconstitutional in its principle, oppressive in its operation, and destructive of the Liberty of the Press.

6th. That such associations have appeared to us the more exceptionable from an attentive observation of their proceedings. Whilst mutually binding and engaging themselves to enforce the execution of the laws against seditious libels, they have themselves produced and circulated publications, containing doctrines long since exploded, and which, if admitted, would prove the Revolution to be an act of rebellion, and the title of the reigning Family to the throne of these kingdoms to be founded in usurpation and injustice.

7th. That a system of jealousy and arbitrary coercion
of

of the people have been at all times dangerous to the stability of the English Government.

8th. That anxious to preserve the public peace as connected with public Liberty, this Meeting considers it as an indispensable duty to warn their fellow subjects against all proceedings which appear to be inconsistent with either, *on whatever pretext they may be grounded.* We are therefore determined to oppose, to the utmost of our power, every attempt to prejudice any part of the Constitution, to maintain that which appears to be its best security, the Freedom of the Press; and to use our endeavours to counteract the effect of measures which seem calculated to suppress those liberal sentiments, and that manly freedom of discussion, which form the life and soul of the British Constitution.

9th. That the thanks of this Meeting are particularly due to the Hon. Thomas Erskine, for his Constitutional Defence of the Freedom of Opinion and the Liberty of the Press in a late Trial; a Defence in which he displayed ability, independence, zeal, eloquence, never surpassed on any former occasion at the English Bar, though that Defence was made under circumstances of such peculiar difficulty and embarrassment, as required his determined spirit and unshaken fortitude to overcome, and though he had to encounter every prejudice which art and industry could excite.

By Order of the Meeting.

(Signed)

GERARD NOEL EDWARDS.

Chairman.

Resolved,

Resolved,

That the thanks of this Meeting be given to the Chairman, for his fair, honourable, and impartial conduct.

Resolved,

That this Meeting do now adjourn until Saturday the 19th of January next.

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DECLARATION

OF THE FRIENDS

TO THE

Liberty of the Press,

At their Second Meeting, January 22, 1793.

MR. ERSKINE, who presided, said that though he did not care for calumny and misrepresentation, as far as it affected himself personally, which he took it for granted was the case with every Gentleman present; yet, as far as it affected the great object for which they were assembled it was of the greatest importance to the Public: that he should, therefore, to render misrepresentation utterly impossible, read what he had to say from a paper, which he had written.

Mr. ERSKINE then read the following Paper:

“ The peculiar excellence of the English Constitution, in which indeed the value of every Government may be summed

summed up, is, that it creates an equal rule of action for the whole Nation, and an impartial administration of justice under it.

“ From these master principles results that happy, unsuspecting, and unsuspected freedom, which for ages has distinguished Society in England, and which has united Englishmen in an enthusiasm for their Country, and a reverence for their Laws.

“ To maintain this fearless tranquillity of human life, the prime blessing of Social Union, the power of accusation was not given to *uninjured* individuals, much less to *voluntary, undefined, unauthorised* Associations of Men, acting without responsibility, and open to irregular and private motives of action; but was conferred upon the Supreme Executive Magistrate, as more likely to look down upon the Mass of the Community with an unimpassioned eye; and even that wisely placed trust, guarded and bridled by the personal responsibility of those Officers by which the Crown is obliged to exercise its authority, and in the higher order of crimes, (which on principle should extend to all,) guarded once again by the office of the Grand Jury, interposed as a shield between the People and the very Laws enacted by themselves.

“ These admirable provisions appear to be founded in a deep acquaintance with the principles of Society, and to be attended with the most important benefits to the Public; because, tempered again, and finally with the Trial by the Country, they enable the English Constitution to ratify the existence of a *strong, hereditary, executive* Government, consistently with the security of popular freedom.

“ By this arrangement of the Royal Prerogative of Accusation, so restrained and mitigated in its course, the
Crown

Crown becomes an object of wholesome, but not dangerous jealousy ; which, while it prevents it from overstepping its Constitutional limits, endears the People to one another from a sense of the necessity of union amongst themselves, for the preservation of their privileges against a power dangerous to remove, but equally dangerous to exist, unobserved and unbalanced.

“ Under this system, making allowance for the vices and errors inseparable from humanity, State accusations, *in modern times*, though sometimes erroneous, have not often been rash or malevolent, and the Criminal under the weight of the firm hand of Justice has been supported by the indulgent fraternal Tribunal of his Country.

“ But under the circumstances which assemble us together, all these provisions appear to be endangered.

“ A sudden alarm has been spread through the Kingdom by the Ministers of the Crown, of imminent danger to the Constitution, and to all Order and Government. The Nation has been represented to be fermenting into Sedition and Insurrection, through the dangerous Associations and Writings of disaffected and alienated subjects ; and under the pressure of this perilous conjuncture the Parliament has been suddenly assembled, and the Militia embodied.

“ The existence or extent of these evils since they have been sanctioned, though not ascertained by the authority of Parliament when assembled, we have not upon the present occasion assembled to debate. But we may, without Sedition, congratulate our Fellow-subjects, that our Ministers had the vigilance to detect those *numerous and bloody* Insurrections, which otherwise might have *secreted themselves*, and passed *unknown and undiscovered* ; and that

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without the punishment of a single individual, for any Overt Act of Treason, the People have recovered all that tranquillity and respect for the Laws which they appeared to us to have equally possessed at the time when the alarm burst forth.

“ That large classes of the Community should nevertheless give faith to the assertions and acts of a *responsible* Government, is neither to be wondered at nor disapproved. When the English Constitution is authoritatively represented to be in danger, we rejoice in the enthusiasm of Englishmen to support it. When that danger is further represented to have been caused or increased by the circulation of treasonable and seditious Writings, we acknowledge that it is the duty of every good Citizen in his proper sphere, and by proper means to discountenance them, and nothing is further from the intention of this Meeting than to hold up to public disapprobation such individuals, as from honest motives, have joined Associations even though they may in their zeal have shot beyond that line of exertion which we (mistakenly, perhaps, but conscientiously) conceive to be the safe limitation of assistance to Executive Government by Private Men.

“ We assemble neither to reprehend, nor to dictate to others, but from a principle of public duty to enter our solemn protest against the propriety or justice of those Associations, which by the contagion of example are spreading fast over England, supported by the Subscriptions of opulent men for the avowed object of *suppressing and prosecuting* Writings: more especially when accompanied with rewards to Informers; *and above all*, when these rewards are extended (of which there are instances), to question and

to punish opinions delivered even in the private intercourses of domestic life; unmixed with any act or manifested intention against the authority of the Laws.

“ We refrained at our former Meeting from pronouncing these proceedings to be illegal and punishable, because we must receive the rule from our Statutes and Precedents of Law, which are silent on the subject; but we consider them to be doubtful in law, and unconstitutional in principle from the whole Theory, and all the analogies of English Justice.

“ In the first place, we object to them as wholly unnecessary; and we give this objection precedence, because there ought to be a visible necessity or expediency to vindicate every innovation in the mode of administering the Laws. Supposing then the conjuncture to be what it is by authority represented, the Crown is possessed of the most ample powers for the administration of speedy and universal Justice.

“ If the ordinary Sitzings of the Courts are found at any time to be insufficient for the accomplishment of their jurisdictions, or if even a salutary terror is to be inspired for the general security, the *King* may appoint Special Commissions for the Trial of Offenders.

“ If the Revenue devoted to the ordinary purposes of Criminal Justice should be found insufficient for an unusual Expenditure, Parliament is ever at hand to supply the means; and no Parliament can be supposed to refuse, or the People be suspected to murmur at so necessary an expence.

“ If information also became necessary for the discovery and conviction of offenders, the Crown may at any time, by its authority, set even Informers in motion.

“ But under all this awful process, Public Freedom would still be secured, while the Public Safety was maintained. The Crown still acting by its Officers, would continue to be responsible for the exercise of its authority ; and the Community still bound together by a common interest, and cemented by the undisturbed affections and confidences of private life, would be sound and pure for the administration of justice.

“ This we maintain and publish to be the Genius of the British Constitution, as it regards the Criminal Law.

“ But when without any State necessity, or requisition from the Crown, or Parliament of the Kingdom, bodies of men voluntarily intrude themselves into a sort of partnership of authority with the Executive Power ; and when, from the universal and admitted interest of the whole Nation, in the object or *pretexts* of such Associations, the People (if they continue to spread as they have done) may be said to be in a manner represented by them, where is the accused to find justice amongst his Peers, when arraigned by such combinations ? Where is the boasted Trial by the Country, if the Country is thus to become Informer and Accuser ?

“ Where is the cautious distrust of accusation, if the Grand Jury may themselves (or some of them) have informed against the object of it, brought in the very Bill which they are to find, and subscribed for the prosecution of it ?

“ Where in the end is the mild, complacent, relenting countenance of the Jury for Trial—that last consolation which the humanity of England never denied even to men taken in arms against her Laws, if the Pannel is to come reeking from Vestry-rooms, where they have been
listening

listening to harangues concerning the absolute necessity of extinguishing the very crimes and the criminals, which they are to decide upon in judgment, and to condemn by their verdicts?

“ But if these proceedings must thus evidently taint the administration of Justice, even in the Superior Courts, where the Judges, from their independence, their superior learning, and their further removal from common life, may be argued to be likely to assist Juries in the due discharge of their Office—what must be the condition of the Courts of Quarter Sessions, whose jurisdictions over these offences are co-ordinate—where the Judges are the very Gentlemen who lead those Associations in every County and City in the Kingdom, and where the Jurors are either their tenants and dependents, or their neighbours in the country, justly looking up to them with confidence and affection, as their friends and protectors in the direction of their affairs? Is this a trial by an English Court and Jury? It would be infinitely more manly, and less injurious to the accused, to condemn him at once without a hearing, than to mock him with the empty forms of the British Constitution, when the substance and effect of it are destroyed.

“ By these observations we mean no disrespect to the Magistracies of our Country. But the best men may inadvertently place themselves in situations absolutely incompatible with their duties. Our natures are Human, and we err when we consider them as Divine.

“ These incongruities arising from this rage of popular accusation, or even of declared popular support to accusations proceeding from the Crown, are not our original observa-

observations. We are led to them by the analogies and institutions of the law itself.

“ On this principle, Criminals impeached, not by the People heated with a sense of individual danger, and personally mixing themselves with the charge and the evidence, but, impeached by the House of Commons representing them, are tried, from the necessity of the case, by the Lords, and not by the Country. This anomaly of justice arose from the humanity and wisdom of our ancestors. They thought, that when the complaint proceeded not from the Crown, whose acts the people are accustomed to watch with jealousy, but from the popular branch of the Government, which they lean towards with favour, it was more substantial justice to the meanest man in *England*, to send him for trial before the Lords, though connected with him by no common interest ; but, on the contrary, divided by a separate one, that to trust him to a Jury of his Equals, when the people from which it must be taken was even in *theory* connected with the prosecution, though totally unacquainted, in fact, with its cause, or with its object.

“ We appeal with confidence to the reason of the Public, whether these principles do not apply, by the closest analogy to the proceedings which we assemble to disapprove. For as criminal jurisdictions are local, the offence must be tried in the country, and frequently in the very town where it is charged to be committed ; and thus the accused must not only stand before a Court infected by a *general prejudice*, but in a manner disqualified by a *pointed and particular passion and interest*.

“ We have further to remark, that these objections to
popular

popular associations or the prosecution of crimes, apply with double force when directed against the Press, than against any other objects of criminal justice which can be described or imagined.

“ Associations to prosecute offences against the Game Laws, or frauds against tradesmen (which we select as familiar instances) though we do not vindicate them, nevertheless distinctly describe their objects, and in suppressing illegal conduct, have no immediate tendency to deter from the exercise of rights which are legal, and in which the Public have a deep and important interest.

“ No unqualified person can shoot or sell a Hare, or a Partridge, as long as a monopoly in Game is suffered to continue, without knowing that he transgresses the Law; and there can be no difference of judgment upon the existence, extent, or consequence of the offence. The trial is of a mere fact. By such Associations, therefore, the Public cannot be stated to suffer further than it always suffers by an oppressive system of Penal Law, and by every departure from the due course of administering it.

“ In the same manner, when a Swindler obtains goods on false pretences, he cannot have done so from error, the act is decisive of the intention; the Law defines the crime with positive precision; and the trial is in this case therefore only the investigation of a fact; and in holding out terrors to Swindlers, honest men are in no danger, nor does the Public suffer further than we have above adverted to.

“ These Associations besides, from their very natures, cannot be so universal, as to disqualify the country at large by prejudice or interest from the Office of Trial. They
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are bottomed besides, particularly the last (which is a most material distinction) upon crimes, the perpetration of which are injurious to individuals *as such*, and which each individual in his own personal right might legally prosecute. Whereas we assemble to object to the popular prosecution of those *public* offences which the Crown, if they exist, is bound in duty to prosecute by the Attorney General, where no individual can count upon a personal injury; and where the personal interest of the subject is only as a Member of that Public, which is committed to the care of the Executive Authority of the Country.

“The Press, therefore, as it is to be affected by Associations of individuals to fetter its general freedom, *wholly unconnected with any attack upon private character*, is a very different consideration; for if the nation is to be combined to suppress writings, without further describing what those writings are, than by the general denomination—*seditions*; and if the exertions of these combinations are not even to be confined to suppress and punish the circulation of books, *already condemned by the judgments of Courts*, but are to extend to whatever does not happen to fall in with their private judgments:—if every writing is to be prosecuted which they may not have the sense to understand, or the virtue to practise:—if no man is to write but upon their principles, nor can read with safety except what they have written, lest he should accidentally talk of what he has read;—no man will venture either to write or to speak upon the topics of Government or its Administration—a freedom which has ever been acknowledged by our greatest statesmen and lawyers to be the principal safeguard of that

that Constitution, which liberty of thought originally created, and which a FREE PRESS for its circulation gradually brought to maturity.

“ We *will* therefore *maintain* and *assert* by all legal means this sacred and essential privilege, the Parent and Guardian of every other. We *will maintain* and *assert* the right of instructing our fellow-subjects by every sincere and conscientious communication which may promote the the public happiness; and while we render obedience to Government and to Law, we *will* remember at the same time, that as they exist by the People’s consent, and for the People’s benefit, they have a right to examine their principles, to watch over their due execution, and to preserve the beautiful structure of their Constitution, by pointing out as they arise, those defects and corruptions which the hand of Time never fails to spread over the wisest of human institutions.

“ If in the legal and peaceable assertion of this Freedom we shall be calumniated and persecuted, we must be contented to suffer in the cause of Freedom, as our father’s before us have suffered; but we will, like our father’s, also persevere until we prevail.

“ Let us, however, recollect with satisfaction, that the Law as it stands at this very moment, (thanks to our illustrious patriot, Mr. Fox,) is amply sufficient for the protection of the Press, if the Country will be but true to itself. The extent of the genuine Liberty of the Press on *general* subjects, and the boundaries which separate them from licentiousness, the English Law has wisely not attempted to define; they are, indeed, in their nature undefinable; and it is the office of the Jury alone, taken

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from the County in each particular instance, to ascertain them, and the trust of the Crown, where no individual is slandered, to select the instances for trial by its Ministers, responsible to Parliament.

“This system appears to us amply to secure the government, while it equally protects the Subject; but if this selection is to be transferred to self-constituted Assemblies of men, agitated by a zeal, however honest the Press must be broken up, and individuals must purchase their safety by ignorance and silence.

In such a state, we admit that the other Liberties, which we enjoy under the Laws, might nevertheless continue as long as Government might happen to be justly administered; but should corruption or ambition ever direct their efforts against them, the Nation would be surprised and enslaved—surprised by the loss of their wakeful Sentinels, whom they had shot for only being at their posts, and enslaved from the loss of their armour, which their adversary, under the pretence of a Treaty, had cajoled them to throw away.

“But these evils become not only greater, but absolutely intolerable, when extended to the stimulation of Spies to stab domestic peace, to watch for the innocent in the hours devoted to convivial happiness, and to disturb the sweet repose of private life upon the bosom of friendship and truth.

“It is justly observed by the celebrated Judge Forster, that words are transitory and fleeting, easily forgotten, and subject to mistaken interpretations: their very existence at all, and their criminality, as depending upon context, or sequel, or occasion—all is to rest on the oaths of hired
Infor-

Informers. Is this in the end of the 18th century to be the condition of our cheerful country? Are these to be our chains? And are we, after we have broken them on the heads of tyrants in former ages, to sit down to forge them again for ourselves, and to fasten them on one another?

“ Our last, and not the least objection to popular accusation, is the love we bear to the Government of *England*, and our wish that its functions may be perpetual: it being our opinion, as expressed in our Seventh Resolution, at our former Meeting.

“ That a system of Jealousy and arbitrary coercion of the People has
“ been at all times dangerous to the stability of the English Govern-
“ ment.”

“ For the truth of which we appeal to Human Nature in general, to the characteristic of Englishmen in particular, and to the history of the Country.

“ In the career of such a system of combination, we foresee nothing but oppression; and when its force is extinguished, nothing but discontent, disobedience, and misrule.

“ If Government permits or countenances this distribution of its Executive Powers, how is it to resume them should opinions change, and run the other way? From the artifices and ambition of designing men, the best Governments may, for a season, be unpopular, as we know from experience, that the very worst may triumph for a while by imposture. Should such a change of opinion arrive, as in the nature of things it must, the Administration of Government and Justice will be distracted and

weakened. It will be in vain to inculcate that subjects may persecute one another by combination, but that they must not combine for their common defence. And as in this unnatural tide of flood, no man may expect to be acquitted, however he may love his Country; so in the ebb of the same tide, equally unnatural, it may be difficult to bring to conviction even those who may be plotting its destruction. Against both these departures, from the even and usual course of justice, and all their consequences, we *equally*, and with an *impartial* spirit protest.

“When we consider the great proportion of the Community, that has already *basely* sanctioned the proceedings which we dissent from, the great Authority that countenances them, the powerful influence which supports them, and the mighty revenue raised upon the people, which through various channels rewards many of those who lead the rest, the difficulties which this Address has to encounter; and judging of man from his nature and his history, we expect no *immediate* success from our interposition. But we believe that the season of reflection is not far distant, when this humble effort for the Public will be remembered, and its authors be vindicated by the People of *Great Britain*.”

Crown and Anchor,
19th Jan. 1793.

THOMAS ERSKINE.

(Mr. ERSKINE, who had been frequently interrupted by the loudest applause, concluded with the most joyful and unbounded acclamations of the whole company, who unanimously requested him to sign the Declaration, to which he immediately consented.

A LET-

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LETTER

TO

Mr. REEVES, CHAIRMAN of the Association
for preserving Liberty and Property.

By THOMAS LAW, Esq. One of the Com-
mittee of that Society.

GENTLEMEN,

I FEEL it incumbent upon me to assign to you the reasons which have influenced me to absent myself from the Sub-committee of Correspondence; and in explanation of my conduct, I shall briefly recapitulate my motives for first uniting with your Association, as well as my proceedings as a Member of the enlarged Committee.

I had just obtained *security of property* to the natives of Bengal, Bahar, and Benares, by a fixation of land-tax,

tax, and an abolition of all internal impositions, or to use the words of authority, “ A new *Constitution* had “ *been announced to many millions of the Asiatic subjects of* “ *Great Britain,*” and I was rejoicing in this happy issue of my exertions, when I perused your advertisement, wherein you avowed yourselves to be “ *private* “ *men unconnected with any party or description of per-* “ *sons at home, taking no concern in the struggles at this* “ *moment making abroad, but most seriously anxious to* “ *preserve the true liberty and unexampled prosperity we* “ *happily enjoy in this kingdom.*” My heart immediately informed me that I could zealously and firmly co-operate in such a cause, and with such independency, and I accordingly subscribed my name.

Upon the first day that I became a member of the above-mentioned Committee, when the suppression of inflammatory publications was introduced as our primary object, I recommended, as a previous measure, the counteraction of their effects by cheap pamphlets, and gave the purport of the following extract from an Act of the Assembly of Virginia to corroborate my argument:—“ *That it is time enough for the rightful pur-* “ *poses of civil Government, for its officers to interfere* “ *when principles break out into overt acts against peace* “ *and good order, and that TRUTH is great and will* “ *prevail, if left to herself, that she is the proper and* “ *sufficient antagonist to ERROR, and has nothing to* “ *fear from the conflict, unless by human interposition dis-* “ *armed of her natural weapons, free argument and de-* “ *bate; Errors ceasing to be dangerous, when it is per-* “ *mitted freely to contradict them.*”

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The Gentlemen of the Committee approved of my conduct, and I had the pleasure to see mildness the feature of our deliberations that day; but shortly after this, perceiving with regret, a deviation from your original profession, "*to take no concern in the struggles abroad,*" I felt myself compelled to deliver the following opinion in writing:

" When I had the honour to receive a Letter from the Secretary of this Society, I replied, *That without adverting so the politics of other countries, I should be happy to co-operate for preserving liberty and property against Republicans and Levellers in my own.*

" I conceived it to be the express intention of the enlarged Committee to counteract by cheap publications, the delusive doctrines of seditious libellers; I used the language of moderation the first day, and had the satisfaction to be elected, by strangers to me, for one of the Sub-Committee; but, as we have lately introduced animadversions upon the French, I feel it incumbent upon me to dissent therefrom.

" We are looked up to as the germ of other Associations, and it is not our duty, I trust, to revive national antipathies, which have so long distracted France and Great Britain: the situation of the old government of France bears no analogy to that of Great Britain; *we* have not a Bastile to destroy—*we* have not a trial by jury to establish—the people of Great Britain are, I hope, conscious of the blessings of a free government, and are aware *how very little*

" *they*

*“ they have to gain, and how very much to lose by any
“ Revolution.*

*“ If any emissaries are attempting to alienate the at-
“ tachment of his Majesty’s subjects in this country, I
“ will cordially unite in their detection and apprehen-
“ sion ; but I cannot coincide with the Gentlemen
“ of this Committee, in censuring the conduct of any
“ other Government, let it be ever so erroneous, or in
“ accusing it of trying to subvert our Constitution, as
“ it may complain to our Government of such attacks,
“ and call upon us for proof.*

*“ I move therefore that all our reasonings and that
“ all our exertions, shall be directed against false doc-
“ trines, and against all seditious words, writings,
“ and actions whatsoever, and by whomsoever, and
“ that we do not introduce the French, unless to shew
“ that their arguments and measures cannot be applied
“ to us.”* (Signed,)

T. L.

Upon this occasion I was gratified by seeing the Committee erase those animadversions which they had previously resolved upon, because deliberation shewed them to be unfounded.

The moderation of our measures for a few days afterwards afforded me the sincerest satisfaction, but I felt equal surprise and regret, when the following proceedings took place upon the 11th instant.

*“ A Committee of Correspondence to be nominated, to
“ consist of five members.*

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"1st, *This Committee may do immediately whatever is suggested by letters, or prepare for the General Committee.*

"2dly, *To apply to Government to direct the Solicitor of the Treasury to attend to the suggestions of this Society, This to be done by the Chairman with the Attorney-General.*"

Having been present when anonymous letters were received, darkly accusing some of the first characters in this kingdom, and even his Majesty's officers, which when conveyed to government must necessarily excite alarm and distrust, and considering that individuals, however innocent, had no means of refuting clandestine calumnies, I proposed "That the Committee of Five be directed to burn all anonymous letters accusing individuals," but this proposition was suppressed by carrying the previous question against it.

As I deemed myself responsible for my conduct to the Association at large, I requested the President to record the above proceeding, but he refused; I next stated to the Committee that "*since every motion and every voting formed part of our proceedings, I hoped the foregoing would be entered,*" but, it being put to the vote, it was negatived.

In this predicament I am necessitated to enumerate these particulars in this letter, that reference may be had to it, should any one attribute inconsistency to me, or charge me with a dereliction of principle. I am sincerely attached to my Sovereign and the Constitution of this Government, and I am ready to assist in bringing

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any traitor to punishment ; but I should condemn myself as a false friend to all, if I acted in any measure which tended in my opinion to frustrate the intention of its promoters, and to alienate public affection.

I have asked myself, "*Whether I should do unto others, as I would they should do unto me.*" by admitting and perusing anonymous letters ?—Whether confidence, that band of harmony in society, must not be broken by such a measure ? Whether suspicion has not caused horrid assassinations and convulsions ?—Whether any kind of inquisitorial body does not irritate to commotions ? In short, my conscience has admonished me, that my love of my country, and my desire of its tranquillity, all prohibit concealment.

It will be urged, that it is not necessary to act upon the information of nameless writers ; why then, I ask, shall we wound our minds with baleful impressions, by perusing these letters ? And why let men be sunk in estimation, whom we might otherwise admire ?—The accused, and the person receiving the accusation, are *both* injured by an anonymous letter, if any impression is made by it ; every tribunal in this country requires the impeacher to confront the person arraigned, without which we could not boast that we lived "*rara*" *temporum felicitate ubi licet sentire quod velis et dicere quod sentias* ; but why do I expatiate on this head, I trust that you cannot but approve the principle which determines me to absent myself, however falsely delicate you may consider this determination.

I will cheerfully attend the enlarged Committee, whenever summoned ; and permit me to add, that if
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any treasonable plots existed to my knowledge, which required *peculiar efforts*, I should never withdraw myself from any situation, however irksome, dangerous or even opprobrious, wherein I could be of the least service to my country.

I remain, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient humble servant,

THOMAS LAW.

Dec. 17,

No. 16, *Weymouth-street.*

F I N I S.

A LETTER TO MR. BERRY.
 any reasonable plea called to my knowledge which
 required action, I should never withhold myself
 from any position, however invidious, dangerous or
 even oppositional, wherein I could be of the least service

to my country.
 I remain, Gentlemen,

Your most obedient humble servant,

THOMAS LAW.

OF THE PRESS.
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